

Committee on Resources

Testimony

Mayor Phillip K. Bimstein Testifying Before
the Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands and
the Subcommittee on Aviation,
on November 17, 1997

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and thank you for listening to the testimony of a gateway community which sits at the entrance to a national park, a community in the direct line of flight of the airplanes and air tours you are considering here today.

Please hear our testimony as an example of the many other communities who are the most affected by these deliberations, for we are the people who must live with the impacts of these flights, should you allow them. We appreciate this opportunity to let you and congress know, when an airplane flies over our homes, what we see, hear, and feel.

Let me begin by telling you about an incident at our school two years ago. Della Higley, born in 1914 on land which is now Zion National Park, was speaking to our children in celebration of our state's centennial. Wearing a pioneer dress and bonnet, Della was telling our children what it was like growing up here in a simpler time, when things were quiet and peaceful, and then all of a sudden - there was an earth-shaking boom, which rattled the walls of the school. It startled Della and frightened the children - they dove under their chairs, afraid it was an earthquake. But it was only a sonic boom. It took a while for Della to catch her breath and collect her thoughts, before she could resume her story about the way it used to be...

Unfortunately, this is not an unusual occurrence in Springdale. The booms and roars, the insistent drones and whines of airplane engines are becoming louder and more common every day.

Della Higley told me she has always been against airplanes flying overhead in the park. Last week I went back to our school and asked the kids how they feel about the various aircraft flying over Springdale, big planes, small planes, helicopters and commercial air tours. Here is what they said:

Chelsea, Age 11: "When I go on hikes I do it to get away from noises and when a plane goes over it ruins my whole day."

Sarah, 4th grade: "When I climb the mountains, I like the sound of the wildlife, but when a plane flies over it breaks the silence and I think no planes should fly over Zion, because I want Springdale and Zion to stay the way it is."

James, in 4th grade: "When planes fly over they make small towns into big cities"

Jared, age 10: "I like it when it's quiet - I like it when it's peaceful. Airplanes should be outlawed in Zion and Springdale."

And finally, listen to words of Becky, a 5th grader: "If there's a tour helicopter and you're in it, you're thinking how great it is. But you should think about what if you were down there and you were looking at

an animal. When a tour plane comes over it scares away the animal. Think about what you are doing to other people when you go on a tour plane. It could ruin someone's whole day. It's peaceful when there are no planes. I hope we can stop the planes."

Our children speak unequivocally and with great insight. On this issue, our community speaks with one voice. We are united in our opposition to overflights above Zion National Park, and our feelings are strong. Our zoning ordinances prohibit landing strips, airports and heliports.

We have joined with our neighboring communities who oppose them anywhere in the vicinity.

Our town has twice asked the FAA to ban park overflights.

I am also speaking today for the Zion Canyon Chamber of Commerce, who unanimously passed a resolution opposing overflights, because their customers, the annual 2.5 million visitors to Zion National Park, are deeply offended by them. Overflights may drive their business away.

We work hard to provide our visitors with a good meal, a warm bed, and the quiet time they need to relax and enjoy their experience of Zion. Don't take that quiet away from us, and from them. It is an integral part of the high-quality experience our visitors deserve and expect. The noise and sight of airplanes cheapens their visit and damages our economy, which supports our local families. It also degrades our own quality of life.

It has been argued that air tours are environmentally sensitive, but they are undoubtedly the most insensitive way to see the national parks because they assault the senses of everybody else who is not on the planes, the hundreds and thousands who must see and hear them. As our school children wisely said, just one plane ruins everybody else's day. It intrudes, it breaks the silence like a bull in a china shop, and all of us on the ground, especially we who live under its path, we have no choice - our ears are held hostage by the racket of its engine, our day in the park shattered by the noise like a fly-by shooting.

So I ask you, keep your ears to the ground, to what the people are saying. And when you make your decisions, know that our ears are tuned, wide open. We will be listening, and the 70 million annual on-the-ground visitors to national parks will be listening, and we will hear you, loud and clear.

Thank you.

Phillip K. Bimstein
Mayor, Town of Springdale
PKB/ws Attachments: two previous letters to the FAA

June 4, 1994

Mr. David L. Bennett
Federal Aviation Administration - Office of Chief Counsel
Attention: Rules Docket (AGC-200) - Docket No. 27643
800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Mr. Bennett:

I am writing to you as the Mayor of Springdale, Utah, the town which serves as the gateway community to Zion National Park. On June 2, the Springdale town council voted unanimously to support a complete ban on aircraft overflights above Zion National Park and the surrounding area, and to authorize me to write this letter expressing our views.

The town council and I firmly believe that overflights degrade the park experience both visually and aurally for the nearly three million visitors Zion receives each year. In addition, the aircraft would shatter the natural quiet of our community. Many of us live in Springdale specifically to get away from these noisome intrusions. The quietness of our town is as precious to us as clean water and pure air, and just as deserving of protection.

We feel especially compelled to write because we have read the letter of May 11 written to you by Jerry Lewis of the Five County Association of Governments. In his letter, Mr. Lewis suggests he is speaking for the local governments of southwestern Utah. We take issue with his letter, and want to make it very clear that on aircraft overflights he does not represent the views of Springdale and several other communities near Zion National Park.

In direct contrast to his personal views, the town of Springdale opposes aircraft overflights, and we urge the FAA to ban them completely from national parks. We do not believe in the effectiveness of voluntary compliance, as current FAA advisories are already widely disregarded over the National Parks in our area. Finally, we do not concur that the overflight industry is important to our region's economic base, and in fact believe that overflights may negatively impact our local economy by degrading the tourist's experience and deterring on-the-ground visitation to our motels, restaurants and shops.

In summary, we believe aircraft overflights are a serious threat to our community. We urge the FAA to preserve and protect the natural and historic landscapes of Springdale and Zion National Park, and to ban all overflights over the National Park System.

Thank you for considering the views of our directly-affected community, and please send us a copy of your proposed rules.

Sincerely yours,

Phillip K. Bimstein
Mayor, Springdale

September 25, 1996

Federal Aviation Administration
Office of the Chief Counsel
ATTN: Rules Docket (AGC-200)
Docket # 28537
800 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Federal Aviation Administration:

As Mayor of Springdale, Utah, gateway community to Zion National Park, I am expressing our town council's concerns with the FAA's new rules for Grand Canyon overflights. I feel these concerns are probably shared by most of the three million annual visitors to Zion, many of whom also visit the Grand Canyon, which is only seventy miles away.

I urge you to reduce the number of flights over the Grand Canyon to 1987 levels, and that the cap be made permanent.

While I applaud the curfews on flights, they may tend to compress the same number of flights into a shorter time period, which would only add to the level of noise. I urge you to mandate both curfews and reductions.

Natural quiet should be restored throughout more of the Park; the FAA's proposals, making rarely-used areas off-limits for tour flights, does little to restore the Canyon's quiet.

Finally, I urge the FAA's rule to include incentives for tour operators to use quieter aircraft.

Furthermore, I ask that aircraft noise be controlled and possibly eliminated in other national parks and especially Zion. Overflights degrade the park experience both visually and aurally, and they shatter the natural quiet of our community. Many of us live near a national park specifically to get away from these noisy intrusions. The quietness of our town is as precious to us as clean water and pure air, and just as deserving of protection.

As the rule-making process for other national parks is being considered, I would appreciate being kept informed and having the opportunity to provide additional input.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Phillip K. Bimstein
Mayor, Town of Springdale

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